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ABSTRACT

The Fort Bend Independent School District (a large, growing school district in Sugar Land, Texas) elected to become a Reading Recovery Teacher Training site and faced many decisions regarding effective implementation, including campus (school) selection. They began slowly with only two campuses the first year, added four to five the second year, and five in the third year. The plan of campus selection is a multi-tiered model which serves to: (1) ensure that campuses which implement Reading Recovery are committed to its effective implementation; (2) create a partnership between the central office and campuses; (3) result in full-implementation at each campus; and (4) institutionalize Reading Recovery as a vital part of the district's overall literacy program. The district uses three steps in the selection process: application, interview, and classroom observation. The site selection process for Reading Recovery is only a small part of program implementation; however, it is a crucial component of overall program effectiveness. Selecting the correct match between campuses and the innovation can better ensure that Reading Recovery does indeed provide an important component in schoolwide success. (RS)

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A Process for Site Selection of Reading Recovery Campuses.

by Mary Jackson

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A Process for Site Selection of Reading Recovery Campuses

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Three years ago the Fort Bend Independent School District elected to become a Reading Recovery Teacher Training site based upon an in-depth investigation of successful early intervention programs for children at-risk of reading failure. Because we are a large, growing district of approximately 46,000 students, we were immediately faced with many decisions regarding effective implementation of this program. Of considerable concern to us was campus (school) selection. At the time we had 28 campuses and we were projected to add at least one new elementary school yearly for five years. Although we knew that every campus could potentially profit from Reading Recovery (RR), finances, organizational obstacles, and sheer numbers of campuses made districtwide implementation impractical in the short term. Consequently, we began slowly with only two campuses in our first year, adding four to five in our second year, and five in our third. One teacher leader served our site the first two years, and a second one joined our team this year. While this may seem to be a minimal implementation plan, we believe our model has merit. In our plan of gradual growth leading to district-wide implementation, we have, in fact, helped ensure that the program is implemented according to guidelines, is highly successful, and is a vital part of *schoolwide* improvement. Of particular value to other districts, we believe, is our method of campus selection.

Our plan of campus selection, is a multi-tiered model which serves to accomplish the following:

- ensure that campuses which implement Reading Recovery are committed to its effective implementation as an integral part of schoolwide improvement
- create a partnership between the central office and campuses
- result in full-implementation at each campus
- institutionalize Reading Recovery as a vital part of the district's overall literacy program

Our goal is to avoid an all too common occurrence in school districts, that of a revolving door implementation of new initiatives. Our plan emphasizes commitment and long-term, successful implementation and we incorporate components into the selection process which lead to this outcome. It is a systems approach which emphasizes team planning and decision-making.

In the model there are three steps in the selection process: a) application, b) interview, and c) classroom observation. This multi-tiered process is essential in effective, impartial decision-making.

The Application Process: Comprehensive Evaluation

Before a campus considers application, the Reading Recovery teacher leaders conduct a session to acquaint possible applicants with the Reading Recovery program and the application process. Because Reading Recovery has been spotlighted and discussed throughout the district in a number of different venues, these sessions have recently been expanded to include representatives from program campuses who can directly answer questions about implementation, results, etc.

We underscore the need for campuses to reflect upon their reasons for considering implementation and to reach a team consensus before moving forward. Critical questions for campuses to consider before applying to become a Reading

Figure 1
School Application for Reading Recovery Site Selection

- Develop a rationale statement to explain why your school should implement the Reading Recovery program.
- Reading Recovery is provided as a one-to-one intervention with teachers serving four students for half of their day. What long-term and short-term benefits do you expect from Reading Recovery implementation for individual children in grade one? For your building? For the district?
- What efforts have you and your staff made to learn more about Reading Recovery?

_____ Read research articles
_____ Observed a Reading Recovery lesson at _____.
_____ Discussed program with Reading Recovery staff: Site Coordinator (Director of Special Programs), Teacher Leader, etc.
_____ Attended Reading Recovery sessions at a state or national conference.
_____
Name of Conference
_____ Previewed Reading Recovery tape, "I Can Read" (Available from Teacher Leaders, Glover Elementary).
_____ Formed study groups to explore the feasibility of Reading Recovery implementation at our school. Who has been involved?
_____

- Describe the language arts program at your campus.
- Does your facility have classroom space for the Reading Recovery program? If so, what space do you have available?
- Identify staff members interested in taking the Reading Recovery training (See enclosed information for requirements).

CANDIDATE CURRENT ASSIGNMENT

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A Process for Site Selection...

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Recovery site include:

- Does our staff understand what Reading Recovery is and how it is implemented?
- Does our campus have a need for this program?
- Has the entire school team considered how this program fits into schoolwide improvement?
- Is Reading Recovery a match with our campus vision, mission, and goals?
- Is our staff committed to long-term, proper implementation of this program?

It has been our experience that many of our campuses have taken this opportunity to evaluate their individual improvement efforts. In one instance, a campus declined to apply after the staff reviewed all the initiatives they had in place and considered how Reading Recovery would fit into their overall plan. Because they were in their first year of implementing multi-age grouping in PK-2, they decided the addition of yet another initiative would be overwhelming to the staff. Their decision not to implement Reading Recovery at the time was appropriate. In contrast, another campus elected to discontinue a two year initiative that was not producing hoped-for results. After studying the research on Reading Recovery and talking with Reading Recovery campus staffs, they made the decision that Reading Recovery would better meet their needs.

FIGURE 2
READING RECOVERY CAMPUS APPLICATION PROCESS: SCORING CRITERIA

SCREENING OF APPLICATION:	
RATIONALE	30 POINTS
BENEFITS	20 POINTS
HOMEWORK	15 POINTS
LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAM	20 POINTS
SPACE	5 POINTS
STAFF	10 POINTS
TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE	100 POINTS

Applications are submitted to the Reading Recovery site coordinator in November (see Figure 2). They are screened by a team which includes the site coordinator, the teacher leaders, the district's language arts coordinator, the Title I coordinator, and a Reading Recovery teacher. Involvement of such a multi-faceted team adds depth and diversity to the collaborative decision-making process. Team members review and score each application individually, using the scoring rubric in Figure 2. Depending upon the number of applicants, the number of sites to be selected, and the range of the scores, a certain number of the campuses are invited to proceed in the selection process. For example, last year there were nine applicants, seven of which were chosen to be interviewed, and five were selected as sites. In general, our team has had a high consistency rate in our scoring. In the few instances where there has been a wide range in our scoring, we have thoroughly discussed individual decisions in order to reach consensus. The highest score received by a campus has been 94, and the lowest 22. The low scoring campus had failed to convince the team that quality discussion and decision-making had taken place among the school's staff prior to the application.

The Campus Interview Process

The second step in the selection process involves campus interviews. The same team who screened the applicants visits the selected school sites and conducts a one hour interview with a team of representatives selected by the campus staff. We ask that persons involved in completing the application be included. We typically meet with 5-10 staff members representing administration, primary grade teachers, upper elementary teachers, counselors, and even parents. At one interview, we met with over 20 persons, including four parents. This team did an outstanding job of communicating the system's goals. It was obvious their team had thoroughly considered the decision to apply and that they were deeply committed to quality implementation of the program within the framework of schoolwide improvement.

The interview process is designed to ascertain team decision-making and commitment (see Figure 3). Of special interest to the interview team is whether: a) there is acceptance, or "buy in", by both primary and upper grade teachers; b) this initiative fits into a total schoolwide plan; and c) support is in place to maximize successful implementation.

Although we believe the *need for an early intervention program* is a critical factor in selection, we do not give this one consideration undue emphasis. All of our schools have a need to address the issue of children at risk of not learning to read, even our top-performing schools. The fact that one school has a much greater need does not, however, lead to an immediate decision to select that campus. Need alone will not ensure effective implementation. Rather, there must be a match between the needs of the school and the characteristics of the early intervention program. In our view, no innovation will succeed if the multiple factors we consider in our application, interview and observation are not in place. Interviews are also scored individually by the selection team members.

The Campus Observation Process

The final stage of the selection process is a "walk-through" of the campus. We included this component as an additional information-gathering effort. In our observations we consider such things as: collections of books in classrooms; displays of children's work; the tone of conversations; the physical arrangements of the classrooms; and types of teacher and student activities. We also factor in administrative team efforts and available support in terms of materials, funds, and personnel. Because Reading Recovery is being implemented within a system, success is highly dependent on the compatibility of the

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FIGURE 3

INTERVIEW: READING RECOVERY APPLICANT SITES

1. WE HAVE REVIEWED YOUR APPLICATION. PLEASE EXPLAIN HOW IT WAS DEVELOPED AND WHO WAS INVOLVED IN COMPLETING IT.
2. PLEASE EXPAND ON THE RATIONALE GIVEN IN THE APPLICATION. SPECIFICALLY, ELABORATE ON THE INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR STUDENT POPULATION AND THE NEED FOR THE INTERVENTION.
3. HOW HAVE YOU COMMUNICATED WITH YOUR STAFF ABOUT THE APPLICATION TO BE A READING RECOVERY SITE? WHAT WERE THEIR RESPONSES? PLEASE GIVE EXAMPLES.
4. WHAT SUPPORT SYSTEMS DO YOU HAVE IN PLACE THAT WOULD COMPLEMENT AND ENHANCE THE READING RECOVERY PROGRAM? EXPLAIN HOW YOU VIEW THEIR CONNECTION TO READING RECOVERY.
5. PLEASE EXPLAIN HOW READING RECOVERY FITS INTO YOUR CAMPUS IMPROVEMENT PLAN.
6. HOW HAVE PARENTS REACTED TO YOUR PROPOSAL TO BECOME A READING RECOVERY SITE?
7. WHAT INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS DO YOU HAVE IN PLACE IN YOUR SCHOOL CURRENTLY? PLEASE EXPLAIN THE STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE PROGRAMS. HOW DO YOU PLAN TO CONTINUE THE SUPPORT OF THESE PROGRAMS WHILE INITIATING IMPLEMENTATION OF READING RECOVERY IN YOUR SCHOOL? WHAT DEMANDS DO YOU THINK THIS WILL PLACE ON YOU AND YOUR STAFF?
8. IF NOT ANSWERED IN QUESTION SEVEN, PLEASE EXPLAIN WHAT YOU ARE CURRENTLY DOING FOR AT-RISK POPULATIONS IN YOUR SCHOOL.
9. HERE ARE SOME OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF READING RECOVERY. WHICH OF THESE DO YOU BELIEVE WILL PRESENT THE GREATEST CHALLENGES IF YOU ARE SELECTED AS A SITE?

system and the program. What we hope to see is print-rich environments with active student-teacher interaction and involvement. A campus may not have all of these elements in prominence, but there should definitely be an indication of a child-centered learning environment which would support the Reading Recovery initiative.

The scoring system for the interview/observation process is included in Figure 4. Again, depending upon the number of sites to be selected, those with the highest scores are chosen to be sites. Once the selection team's decision is made, typically in January, final approval is made by our district's top level administrative team. It is important that all levels of the instructional organization be involved in this process. Involvement by this district team is essential to program longevity, communication and successful implementation.

Notification and Suggestions for Future Application

All applicant campuses are notified of the selection decision in January. For those campuses that are not selected, an individual conference is held. We feel it is important that they know why they were not selected and what support we can provide to them in lieu of selection. In all cases, we offer specific suggestions for future acceptance. We encourage representatives from campuses to reapply and, in most cases, they do. For example, this year two campus teams who had previously applied were selected. They had called upon us for assistance prior to the submission of their application, and had implemented additional literacy efforts critical to the support of Reading Recovery.

An Important Component for Schoolwide Success

The site selection process for Reading Recovery is, of course, only a small part of program implementation; however, we believe it is a crucial component of overall program effectiveness. During the selection process, we establish the beginnings of a close bond that we foster with schools as the program begins and continues. We become an integral part of the school team, a relationship which continues throughout the implementation phase.

In *Reading Recovery: The Wider Implications of an Educational Innovation*, Clay (1994) stated that "an innovation likely to survive will be one which is cohesive both internally (in terms of theory, training, programs, designs, evaluation) and with the host systems (i.e., it must be workable, contributing, cost effective and a winner with the stakeholders)" (p. 130). We believe that our selection process goes far in ensuring that Reading Recovery is cohesive in our district. This team process builds trust and commitment and requires active involvement throughout the system. In selecting the correct match between campuses and the innovation, we can also better ensure that Reading Recovery does indeed provide an important component in schoolwide success.

(The author wishes to acknowledge Melba Kent, Reading Recovery teacher leader, and Cathleen Duvall, language arts coordinator, for their significant contributions in the joint development of this process.)

FIGURE 4

READING RECOVERY CAMPUS SELECTION SCORING CRITERIA

SELECTION OF SITES:	
OBSERVATION	20 POINTS
INTERVIEWS	30 POINTS
ADMIN/LEADERSHIP/TEAM EFFORTS	30 POINTS
"SUPPORT" - MATERIALS, MONEY, PEOPLE	15 POINTS
NEED	5 POINTS
TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS	100 POINTS

References

Clay, M.M., (1994). Reading Recovery: The wider implications of an educational innovation. *Literacy, Teaching and Learning, 1*, 121-141.